

Where Wast Thou When I Laid the Foundations of the Earth?

by Jeremy James



The Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem today.

The Gospel of John speaks of the miraculous healing of a blind man at the pool of Siloam. Since he had been blind from birth, the healing repaired both his brain and his eyes. The brain of a newborn babe takes several months to develop to the point where he can focus his eyes and perceive color. The man himself could appreciate just how astounding his healing had been: **“Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one born blind.” (John 9:32)**

The healing had even altered the contours of his face. Those who had known him for many years, begging by the roadside, were hardly able to recognize him. Verses 9:8 and 9:9 express their perplexity.

Jesus was prompted to perform the healing when his disciples – not the Pharisees – asked whether his blindness was due to his own sin or to the sin of his parents. They seemed to want to understand why anyone would be burdened with such a severe handicap from birth. It could only be for one of two reasons: Either he or his parents had sinned, or God had willed it. They expected Jesus to ascribe it to sin, but he didn’t. Instead he said it was so **“that the works of God should be made manifest in him”** (verse 9:3). In other words, it was the sovereign will of God that this man should be blind from birth. In this instance his disability was used by God, two or three decades after his birth, to edify men with this awesome miracle and betoken His merciful plan for humanity.

It is clear from this miracle and the circumstances in which it arose that, while all suffering is due to sin, it is impossible for us to ascribe specific outcomes to particular sins. Man is simply incapable of comprehending the endless stream of adversity, set in motion by his rebellion, which has plagued him for millennia. Rather, through this wonderful miracle the LORD was showing His providential treatment of mankind, how He extracts from the awful consequences of our sin the precious life experiences that we need to learn more about Him.



The wages of sin

We need to remember that the wages of sin is death. Thus, if God permitted sin to exact its inevitable effect in full, we would very likely be dead at birth. The whole of humanity would vanish within a generation. This is why we call Jesus the savior of mankind. He literally took upon himself the full consequences of our sin and thereby enabled our Father to carry through with His plan of Redemption – which includes the regeneration of all things.

We can understand His plan in outline. The detailed operation – if we can use that term – behind all that He is doing is hidden from view. Many like to speculate about this but they are wasting their time. It is simply impossible for us to comprehend the variety and intricacy of everything that God is doing, either in heaven or on earth. As the LORD says in the book of Isaiah:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

How high are the heavens above the earth? As high as it is possible to be. There is a huge gulf between the puny focus of our tiny, ineffectual minds and the vast, omniscient perspective that our wonderful Creator enjoys eternally over all things.

Man thinks he can debate with God the righteousness of His acts or challenge Him on some aspect of His holy will. They question whether He can justly claim to be **“righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works.” (Psalm 145:17)**

The Apostle Paul is referring to this attitude when he asks, **“O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” (Romans 9:20)**

How God answered Job and his friends

The three friends of Job did much the same. They tried to account for his awful predicament, the terrible disasters that assailed him, by their intellectual ingenuity. It never occurred to them that God might act in ways that defied our limited understanding. They had unwittingly placed a limitation on the sovereignty of God.

Calvin did this too when he decided that God must have decreed, even before He made the world, which souls would be saved and which would be subject to eternal damnation. He did not see how God could possibly accomplish His holy will in any other way. It hardly seemed reasonable – as he saw it – that God could give complete freedom of choice to all men and *still* accomplish His holy will. But this is the sovereignty that God enjoys! It is the sovereignty that He has exercised since the foundation of the world.

God answered Job’s three friends with a question that should stop each and every one of us in our tracks:

**“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?
declare, if thou hast understanding.” (Job 38:4)**

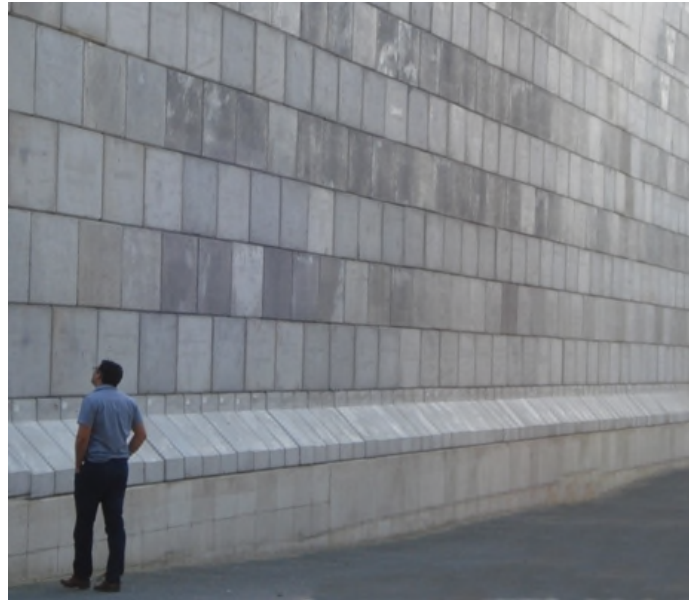
They couldn’t answer it, and neither can we. God gave the reason for this when he issued a challenge alongside the question: *Declare, if thou hast understanding!*

You see, we don’t have the understanding. We cannot possibly comprehend the magnitude of what God is doing. This is why Jesus said we must become as little children if we are to enter into the kingdom of God. The little child trusts his father.



The wall of false reasoning

This brings us to the way the Enemy has used this conundrum to cripple our spiritual faculties. It is especially effective with men and women who have strong minds and like to solve the so-called *problems of existence* for themselves. They mull over the evidence, as they see it, and conclude that God is neither perfect nor loving because we live in a world that is gravely marred by imperfection, where suffering and pain are universal, and where even the best of men are certain to die eventually.



About five years ago I received a lengthy email along these lines. The writer took a staunch line against Christianity and the Bible, but did so on foot of many years of reading and reflection. He was also influenced greatly by the loss of dear family members. I believe his views are worth reading for the insights they give into the real-life issues that all non-believers face. The Enemy has imprisoned their minds inside a huge wall of doubt and scepticism and it hardly seems possible – as they see it – to find a way out. The more they struggle the bigger the wall becomes.

His letter is not an easy read and contains several blasphemous statements. I hope our readers will understand why we felt it was necessary to leave them in.

Here is the unedited version of what he said:

Dear Sir,

Just stumbled upon your website this evening and in particular read the article about the dinosaur hoax. This is not a new subject for me as a lifelong reader on countless subjects. In fact many of the subjects you address I have read about over the years. I am 77, married for 53 years to my one and only wonderful wife and still counting. Of course the world is overrun with hoaxes, such as the moon landing, the dinosaur hoax and false flag operations the world over.

I was brought up in a Pentecostal Church and went to church for many years. I have read the Bible from cover to cover many times and studied portions of it innumerable times. I believed the "Bible" was "the word of God" for many years.

I would like to ask this question. How could a supernatural being just simply always have existed, had no origin and no beginning, and always just simply lived for trillions of years? Did he live in darkness before he created light? Have you ever seen this "God" or carried on an intelligent conversation with him? Please do not quote verses from the Bible to me, because the bible is a 100% man-made invention.

If you gave as much time and study to where the bible came from and its origin as you have about dinosaurs, you would have come to know that the bible is also a hoax. There is no such thing as "original sin." In fact the word "sin" is an invention of men. Have you ever seen this character called "Satan" or carried on a conversation with him?

It took me many years to come to realize that there is NO PROOF of life after death and ink on paper called "the Bible" is no proof at all. My Dad was a firm believer and a praying man and he died when I was 11-years old and he was only 31. All the prayers in the world for him were to no avail. My youngest daughter suffered for years from breast cancer, went through all the protocol of chemo, radiation and surgeries and then she died at age 31, leaving behind a wonderful husband and two beautiful young children. She was a firm believer in Jesus Christ, a praying woman, a faithful church goer and a Christian and yet hundreds of prayers on her behalf were to no avail. Supposedly "God is love", but I have proof that this "God" never answers prayer.

Is God "love" when thousands of people are buried alive in earthquakes, or killed in tornadoes, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, massive fires and floods and so forth?

All Christians ever do is make excuses for God, that "sin" is the reason. I do not believe it.

I have volumes to say from personal experiences, a lifetime of study and reading and observation. I came to realize that the "Bible" portrays this being Christians call "God" as a barbarian, author of Old Testament genocide, sex slaves, baby and child murderer, invasion of the land of others by the so-called tribes of Israel, and a very sadistic being. In fact the book of "Revelation" is a book of massive violence and horrors and terrorism and a complete work of fiction.

We are told that Jesus came teaching love and do unto others as you would have them do unto you and blessed are the merciful and so forth, and yet the Old Testament is anything but. The story of Ananias and Sapphira in the book of Acts, where these two people were supposedly struck down dead at the feet of Peter, defies everything Jesus came teaching.

Well, why make excuses for the bible or for god? There are no excuses and the bible is not the word of god, and you have never encountered this god you preach about. My suggestion is to do a lot more research about the bible, because it is the greatest hoax on earth.

All the best,

[name]



The Death of Ananias by Raphael [detail]

And here is my reply:

Dear [name],

Many thanks for your email and your many thoughtful questions.

You are not alone. There are millions today who hold much the same views and opinions as you do. Many are very fine people, men of great intelligence and kindness, people who really care about others and the state of the world. It grieves them to see how much suffering is in the world and find it incomprehensible that a loving God would allow any of this to happen.

The key word in the last paragraph is 'incomprehensible'. It means we don't understand. Alas, in our pride, we ascribe our failure to understand to God Himself. Our rationality is beyond question, so the fault must be His. If He exists at all, He got it wrong. The world is a mess and the blame lies with (a) chaos or (b) a god who failed.

Perhaps that does not exactly describe where you stand but I suspect it is fairly close.

In many ways these thoughts are expressed in the Book of Ecclesiastes. The author (Solomon) looks closely at everything around him with his dazzling intellect and finds it is all 'Vanity'. Pointless, idiotic, chaotic, meaningless. Only toward the end of his work do we see that, despite his excoriating analysis, there is still something he can't quite figure out. He is convinced that, despite everything his mind is telling him, there is still a purpose behind everything. He asks his readers to fear/obey God and keep His commandments. If they do they have some chance of finding this purpose.

The next book of great relevance to your enquiry is the Book of Job. He had everything and lost it all in a series of inexplicable disasters. Even though he had lived blamelessly in his own eyes, he finds himself in a place which he thought could never befall anyone but the most wicked. His 'friends' thought so too. But Job, in all his suffering, still knew, like Solomon, that there was a purpose behind it all. It annoyed him intensely to know that he couldn't grasp that purpose, but he kept going in the hope that it would one day become clear to him.

Job was struggling with the sovereignty of God. He believed that he had the ability to ‘understand’ God and expected to decipher every spiritual conundrum through his knowledge of God and His works. Yet he found himself in a situation, mired in grief and suffering, where absolutely no effort on his part could take him past that huge obstacle – How could God do this to Him if he had lived blamelessly?

Job did not believe that God’s sovereignty extended beyond anything man can imagine. He had unknowingly placed a limitation around God. Toward the end, when he realized that this was what he had done, he said: “...therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.” (Job 42:3)

God knew when He created the world that it would descend into the condition we now see around us. But He did so with the intention of redeeming it all through His Son. Since “The LORD is righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works” this plan, if we may call it that, was perfect. Of course, we can scarcely glimpse that this is the case. Perhaps that is why Job named his three daughters as he did: Jemima, Kezia, and Karenhappuch. Jemima means “day to day”, Kezia is “cassia”, a fragrant aromatic spice, and Karenhappuch means a container of cosmetic face paint. Every time he saw them, in the years remaining to him here on earth, he was reminded of the need to take everything day by day, to breathe deeply of the fragrance that he could perceive, and to know that, while here on earth, he would never ever see beyond the surface of all that God is doing.

So where does that leave you, [name]? I would invite you to read these two books and reflect on what God is saying. But do this with some humility. Allow for the possibility that you may be wrong and that the message conveyed in Ecclesiastes and Job is a truth of great importance to you.

In your email you also express doubt about God's compassion. We easily forget that God's compassion is visible only to those who are themselves compassionate. The greater our own compassion, the more clearly we perceive the depth and immensity of God's compassion.

One way to foster our own compassion is to do something that helps to relieve the suffering of others. Once we see the difference it makes, we then give ourselves more to the service of others. We start to understand what God is doing in the world. And we come to see that the Bible, His Word, is a glorious compendium of all that He expects us to know and understand.

I hope this helps.

Blessings

Jeremy

Unless Ye Repent

Jesus never asked any of his disciples to "understand" the world or the will of God. Rather, he directed their attention to the one and only issue that mattered. There was only one thing they could do to break the grip that Satan had over them. It was encapsulated in a single word: "Repent!"

He asked them why the 18 were killed when the tower in Siloam collapsed. He referred also to the Galilaeans whom Herod had executed:

"Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:2-3)

There is a great urgency in his words! He came to this world to set us free, but we cannot possibly receive that freedom until we admit that we are in a truly desperate situation. We are already under condemnation and destined for destruction. The "lost" are lost in the fullest meaning of the term.

John Phillips, who taught for 25 years at Moody Bible Institute, summed it up as follows:

“Nothing can save the man who is determined to stand on his record; who insists, “I’m doing the best I can.” ... The sinner can either ask God for a free pardon or demand a fair trial. If he chooses the fair trial, it will land him in the lake of fire, for he will be judged according to his works. To receive the free pardon he must plead guilty, cast himself upon the mercy of God, and accept the salvation He offers through Christ. This he must do before it is too late.” - *Exploring Revelation*, p.243

Be assured, the mental gymnastics of which we are capable in our fallen condition will ALWAYS find a way to justify our rejection of Christ. However, if we turn to the LORD, with humility and respect, He will hear our cry. His grace and mercy will lift us briefly above the wall of false reasoning that Satan has placed around us. This will enable us to see that we ARE lost and that we need a Savior. Only then will men repent.



Faith drives out bitterness

It may help to remember the man who was blind from birth. Despite his infirmity he was not caught “**in the gall of bitterness**” like Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:23). Neither did he “**charge God foolishly**” (Job 1:22). His experience of life had not darkened his understanding. When the Jews took him aside and began to interrogate him about the miraculous healing that he had received, he was not intimidated in the least by their bluster.

First they tried to get him to doubt that Jesus was the source of his healing. When they accused Jesus of being a sinner, he cheerfully replied, “**Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.**” (John 9:25). They then tried to get him to describe what Jesus did to heal him. Unperturbed by their impertinence, he cheekily asked, “**I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?**” (John 9:27).

They were greatly annoyed by his attitude and asked how any man could have done what he claimed Jesus had done. They even admitted that they didn't know where Jesus came from. At this point the man spoke forth a volley of wise and humorous epithets:

“Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.”

(John 9:30-33)

Enraged by his effrontery, they threw him out.

CONCLUSION

Spiritually speaking, we are all blind from birth. Our eyes are opened only when we accept the healing that Jesus offers. Those whose eyes are opened hold no bitterness against God for the state of the world. They understand the devastation that sin has wrought, that the whole of creation was perfect at the beginning and that, through the work that Christ did on Calvary, it will be perfect again one day.

Praise the LORD for His Mercy!

**“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness;
but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”**

– 1 Corinthians 1:18

Jeremy James

Ireland

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jeremypauljames@gmail.com

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